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WHY JAPAN RESISTS RUSSIA.

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AND MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY FROM JAPAN
TO THE UNITED STATES.

THE task of explaining Japan's motives in resisting the accomplishment of Russia's aims in the Far East is not a difficult one. Nevertheless, I undertake it with some hesitation, because the causes which brought about the present situation have been so frankly explained by my Government that further comment seems almost superfluous. Possibly, however, there may be an impression in some minds that Japan has gone to war from motives of ambition, or that her success would endanger the interests of friendly nations; and, to controvert even a problematical belief of that kind, I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to recapitulate the facts.

The fundamental purpose of Japan's action has been to safeguard vital interests which would be seriously menaced if Russia absorbed Manchuria, and followed that by the inevitable sequence of such action, the absorption of Korea. There is no reason to doubt that the latter step forms part of the general scheme of Russia's advance in the Far East. Her course in Manchuria points to the conclusion that she intends to make its provinces, sooner or later, a part of the Russian Empire. Russia once in

undisputed possession of Manchuria, the Korean peninsula would be an easy prey; and there is nothing in what we know of the rules that govern Russian policy in the Far East that suggests the belief that the temptation would be resisted.

To Japan everything affecting Korean affairs is of the gravest consequence. Occupancy by a foreign Power would mean, at the very least, the restriction of the commerce and of the peaceful activities of her people in the most promising field for their development on the continent of Asia. If the occupying Power were Russia, it would mean far more; because it would certainly entail measures of self-protection which could not but become a serious drain upon the national resources. I am speaking now, of course, of the political control of Korea by another Power. So far as commercial and other legitimate enterprises are concerned, Japan has never had the slightest desire either to prevent their introduction or to hamper their growth. On the contrary, if she had a deciding voice in the matter, such influences would be welcomed and fostered, as they contribute to the development of an independent, enlightened and prosperous nation; and that is precisely what Japan wishes Korea to be. Near neighborhood and the distribution of power in Asia make the welfare of the peninsular empire a matter of such vital concern to Japan that, from motives of policy, if for no other reason, she must favor anything which raises Korea in the scale of civilization and tends to prevent the recurrence of those chaotic conditions which endanger Korean and Japanese interests alike. Korea's first modern treaty, the treaty which introduced her into the family of nations, was made with Japan. It was based on principles of mutual equality and removed Korea from the anomalous position she then occupied, which rendered her a tempting object for aggression and conquest. The Japanese treaty was followed by one with the United States, and that by others with European Powers. Japan welcomed each one as another safeguard to the maintenance of the national entity of Korea so essential to her own repose and security. The relations of the two countries since that time have grown in importance. Notwithstanding several stormy episodes, these relations have been, on the whole, amicable and mutually beneficial; and, I firmly believe, an impartial verdict would be that Japan's conduct toward her weaker neighbor has been considerate and helpful. The war with China was the direct result

of Japan's desire to maintain Korean independence, by preventing the continuance of a state of affairs which gave rise to the most serious complications. While one of the results of that war was, happily, the establishment of more cordial relations between Japan and China, in nothing that followed can there be found a trace of diminution of any of Korea's attributes as an independent State.

I have dwelt upon this phase of the question because, as I indicated at the outset, Japan's relations with Korea furnish the keynote of the situation. It is true that Japan has commercial interests in Manchuria, to the profitable development of which under normal conditions she had every reason to look forward with confident expectation. It is true, also, that under the policy inaugurated by Russia since her occupation of Manchuria this commerce has been threatened, if not with extinction, certainly with serious restriction. But considerations of this nature, and the injustices they entail, grave though they undoubtedly are, could never be regarded as sufficient reason for a resort to war. Other nations have important commercial interests in Manchuria which are affected injuriously by Russia's action in the same manner as those of Japan. But to no nation, except to China and Korea, has the trend of Russian policy in the Far East during the past few years been of such moment as to Japan. What was the ultimate object of that policy? Viewing the steadily widening area of Russian encroachment, a definite answer to that question became imperatively necessary. If Russia's ambition was as voracious as her actions, if not her words, indicated, there was no time to be lost in at least attempting to secure guarantees of safety. It has been said of Russia that she moves along the line of least resistance, but always moves, slowly, irresistibly, like a glacier. But since 1895 she has moved by leaps, and not always along the path where resistance was least to be expected. She effected the retrocession of Port Arthur, on the ground that its occupation by a foreign Power was a menace to the peace of the East and the integrity of China. Within three years, she held Port Arthur herself, under a nominal lease; and since then, by the expenditure of millions, she has made it a second Gibraltar. She obtained China's consent to shorten the Siberian railway by the construction of a line, under her own and China's joint control, south of the Amur. That simple concession quickly led to

others; until, finally, a system of railways was evolved which gave Russia strategic control of the whole of North China, the share of China herself in the direction of the project having meanwhile dwindled into insignificant proportions. These symptoms of almost feverish activity in the extension of the Russian sphere of domination in the Far East culminated in the armed occupation of the whole of Manchuria, upon pretexts for which the Boxer troubles furnished occasion. Coincidentally, there were indications of similar activity in Corea. Russian agents, official and unofficial, were pursuing a course that plainly indicated a design to gain control of important strategic points. In particular, there was an endeavor to widen a concession obtained by a Russian Company for cutting timber upon the Yalu into a project not unlike that carried out under the Manchurian concessions. The Japanese Government could not fail to view these movements with grave concern. It had shared in the settlement of the questions resulting from the Boxer disturbances on the same footing with other Treaty Powers, and had sought to gain no special advantage for Japan. Russia, on the other hand, retained possession of Manchuria long after the disturbances in China had ceased; and, although she had bound herself by treaty to withdraw her troops, signs were not wanting that she did not intend to keep the pledge except upon conditions still undivulged.

Such was the situation in the spring of last year. It then became known that the Russian *Chargé d'Affaires* at Peking, M. Plancon, was endeavoring to obtain additional pledges from the Chinese Government preliminary to the Russian evacuation. Denial was made at the time that such conditions had been proposed with the sanction of the Russian Government; but the fact remains that they were embodied by M. Plancon in an official communication, and that the Chinese Government regarded them as an expression of the wishes of Russia. Their plain intent was to place Manchuria as firmly under Russian control as would have been the case had Russia possessed the actual sovereignty. One stipulation, in particular, is of especial interest to Americans in the light of recent events. It read as follows:

"That the Chinese Government will not make any decision with regard to the opening to foreign trade of any new treaty-ports in Manchuria, and the establishment of foreign Consuls there, without previous consultation with the Imperial Government."

M. Plancon was not successful, however, in obtaining China's assent to this, or to any other of the proposals he had made as conditions precedent to the fulfilment by Russia of her pledge to withdraw her forces from Manchuria. Then M. Lessar, the Russian Minister, returned to Peking, and there is incontrovertible proof of the fact that, soon after his return, he began negotiations identical in purpose with those which had been carried on by M. Plancon. Russia was, apparently, not willing to perform a treaty obligation originally unconditional, except upon terms not mentioned when she first incurred it. The nature of those terms can be judged from the demand made by M. Lessar upon the Chinese Government, as late as last September, that all mining, forestry and other similar concessions in Manchuria should be granted to Russia. Whether the Russian Government was aware of M. Plancon's original demands or not, or of M. Lessar's practical revival of them, it finally conceded the fact that negotiations were being carried on at Peking to "safeguard" Russia's interests preliminary to the evacuation of Manchuria. In July it informed the Treaty Powers that it had no intention of objecting to the opening of new treaty-ports, without "foreign settlements," for the development of trade.

The curious uncertainty which these occurrences disclosed regarding Russia's real intentions with reference to the future status of Manchuria, was the immediate cause which induced Japan to take the initial step to obtain from her a definite and binding understanding as to their respective interests in Corea and Manchuria. This step was taken in obedience to a duty which it would have been folly to disregard. In the presence of a situation that was becoming acute, and in the light of events hastening to a culmination that could not but be disastrous to her interests, self-protection demanded immediate action on Japan's part.

The first note formally embodying the views of the Japanese Government was sent to the Russian Government on the 12th of last August. I do not think I can do better than to quote in full the first three articles proposed therein as the basis of an agreement, since they embody the substance of Japan's case. They are as follows:

"First. A mutual engagement to respect the independence and territorial integrity of China and Corea;

"*Second.* A mutual engagement to maintain the principle of equal opportunity for the commerce and industry of all nations in those countries; and

"*Third.* Reciprocal recognition of Japan's preponderating interests in Corea and of Russia's special interests in railway enterprises in Manchuria; and mutual recognition of the right of Japan and Russia, respectively, to take measures for the protection of the above-mentioned interests, *in so far as such measures do not violate the principles enunciated in Article I.*"

These articles embraced, in principle and scope, Japan's representations, from which there was no variation on her part during the progress of the negotiations. I desire to correct, at this point, the impression which seems to have been formed in some quarters, that the Japanese Government insisted upon its right to fortify the Straits of Corea, and thereby to menace not only Russia's line of communication between Vladivostock and Port Arthur, but also free navigation by the commerce of the world in those waters. The question was raised in one of the Russian counter proposals, and the Japanese Government in reply professed its willingness to engage not to interfere with the free navigation of the Straits of Corea. It could not, however, bind itself not to use any part of the territory of Corea for strategic purposes, especially in view of Russia's insistence upon a free hand in that respect, as well as in other respects, in Manchuria. In fact, the only agreement Russia would make regarding Manchuria was, not to impede the exercise of Japan's treaty rights, provided Japan would recognize the provinces as without her sphere of interest, and consent, moreover, to the establishment of a neutral zone comprising practically one-third of Corea, two conditions to which Japan had refused to accede before the proposition regarding Manchuria was made.

It is needless, however, to dwell further upon the details of the negotiations. They are now open to the world, and I firmly believe that the most careful scrutiny will show that my Government acted throughout in a spirit of moderation and conciliation. Each side may be confident of the justice of its cause; but, for our part, we can point to established facts as proof of the sincerity of our motives. If stress is laid upon the fact that Japan made warlike preparations during the progress of the negotiations, it need only be answered that, before negotiations began, Russia's military establishment in Manchuria and elsewhere in the Far East was out of all proportion to any apparent necessity, and that

thereafter there was no cessation in the effort to increase its strength and efficiency. In view of this, it would have been folly on Japan's part not to prepare for the most serious eventuality.

I trust I have offered some proof of the suggestion with which I began this article, that there is no foundation for the belief that Japan was prompted to war by ambition, or that her success, if happily she be successful, implies any danger to other nations. To thoughtful Japanese, there can be no greater cause for wonder than the conjecture whether their country's success may not be the precursor of a new alignment of races, Oriental on the one side, Caucasian on the other. To them it seems no more than a chimerical dream, a suggestion of memories of the age of Genghis Khan, impossible of achievement in these better days of intimate intercourse and mutual interdependence among all nations.

Let me add, also, that those who endeavor to attach some measure of reproach to Japan by characterizing this as a war between a Christian and a non-Christian country, fail utterly to appreciate the efforts my countrymen have made to conform to the spirit as well as to the practices of modern civilization. Freedom of religious belief is as firmly guaranteed in Japan as in any country in the world; and I speak with no thought of self-laudation or of invidious comparison when I express the belief that rectitude of thought and conduct will be as fully exemplified by the actions of my countrymen during the present struggle as by those of their adversaries. Assured of the justice of our cause, yet not desirous of escaping judgment founded on knowledge, we do feel that we have the right to expect exemption from narrow-minded criticism based on prejudices of race or of creed.

K. TAKAHIRA.